

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000185

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/IP/SA
LONDON FOR POL - RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PTER PGOV CASC SOCI NP

SUBJECT: NEPAL: MAOISTS CALL OFF GENERAL STRIKE;

EDUCATIONAL STRIKE THREAT REMAINS IN EFFECT

REF: A. (A) KATHMANDU 0175

1B. (B) 02 KATHMANDU 2456

¶1. (U) The Maoists issued a press release on February 2 cancelling the general strike, or "bandh," scheduled to commemorate the seventh anniversary of their insurgency on February 13-14. The press statement said the strike is being called off in consideration of the "present changing circumstances" brought about by the ceasefire announced January 29 (Ref A). At the same time, however, the statement urges Maoist cadre to conduct peaceful observances of unspecified "programs" to mark the anniversary.

¶2. (U) Despite the cancellation of the general strike, a leader of the Maoist-affiliated All Nepal National Independent Students Union (Revolutionary) (ANNISU-R) told the local press on January 31 that the "indefinite" educational strike called by his organization to begin February 13 will go forward. (Note: The Government of Nepal has not withdrawn the terrorist designation from ANNISU-R as it has from the parent wing. End note.) The ANNISU-R cited what it described as the failure by both the Government and the Private and Boarding School Association of Nepal (PABSON) to fulfill fully commitments they had made (in response to ANNISU-R demands) to end the Maoist strike against private schools December 9-23 (Ref B). A prolonged strike in February will disrupt preparations for final examinations, which are scheduled to begin the first week of March.

¶3. (SBU) One of ANNISU-R's major demands during the last strike was that private schools slash their fees by up to 25 percent. (Note: The way the agreement was structured, schools with the highest fees--and with presumably the most affluent students--agreed to the steepest cuts. Thus, paradoxically, the previous ANNISU-R strike succeeded in getting tuition cuts for the richest families of students at private schools. End note.) According to Rajesh Khadga, the president of PABSON, about 75 percent of the schools that are members of PABSON have reduced their fees "to some extent," although not necessarily by the amount agreed. He said his organization is trying to contact ANNISU-R, whose members are still underground, about their demands. He added that PABSON member schools will not postpone final exams.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: As is all too typical, the Maoists appear to be talking out of both sides of their mouths, calling off a limited general closure as a show of purported good will while cynically allowing an indefinite strike targeting the most vulnerable elements of the population--children--to go forward. Alternatively, the question of bandhs may provide a public demonstration of whether the Maoist high command can--or wants to--control the actions of younger cadre who may have their own agenda. Whether the strike goes ahead as planned--and whether the Maoists, as in the past, use violence to enforce it--will be important tests of the insurgents' good faith in pursuing dialogue. The Embassy will hold an EAC meeting February 4 to review the situation and to make recommendations to the international school board.

MALINOWSKI